

# Marines Put Glorious Finish to Their Job in Belleau Wood

Up and At 'Em Again, "Devil Dogs" Followed First Battle With Long, Hard Grind That Beat Germany's Best

This is the third and final installment of Brig.-Gen. A. W. Catlin's story, "With the Help of God and a Few Marines," which tells of the fighting at Chateau Thierry and in Belleau Wood, where he commanded the Sixth Regiment, United States Marine Corps.

## CHAPTER IX.

**PUSHING THROUGH.**  
THE backbone of the German resistance was broken on the night of June 6 when Sibley went through Belleau Wood and Robertson walked into Boursches, but there still remained much to be done. We held the town and the lower edge of the wood, but it was at best but a precarious foothold. The enemy remained in force to the north of the town, his machine guns were still thick in the greater part of the wood, and his big guns still thundered from back of Torcy. He was daunted by our first rush, but he came back. It took the marines many days to finish the job, but finish it they did.

On June 7 fighting recommenced with a more intense fury, and our losses on that day were even heavier than on the 6th. We launched a series of battalion attacks against the forces in the wood, besides the constant fighting for local positions and the repulsing of counter attacks. On that day Sibley's men resumed their rushing of machine gun positions and their strenuous hand to hand fighting.

**Up and At 'Em Again.**  
At the peak of day they were up and at 'em again as though fresh from their lullies. It was now a matter of thrusting the whole line northward through the wood, and into its darkest maw they plunged, straight into its Dantesque horrors.

There was no respite. The enemy machine guns became more deadly after they had penetrated to some little distance, but they had to keep going. When they could they dug little rifle pits for themselves with the small trench tool carried in the kit, as a slight shelter against that withering fire which fell upon them. They were not to be borne, men curled up in shell holes or crevices in the rocks, or in the shallow trenches they dug, hoping for a brief respite, only to be roused by the uproar of a new conflict or the nearby bursting of a shell.

Occasionally gas was poured into the wood, and that meant fighting in masks. None but the finest type of soldier could have stood up to all this and continue to make progress. They took those machine gun nests one after another, and in some cases were able to turn them on the Germans.

Our artillery was at a disadvantage in not knowing just how far our men had penetrated, but gradually with more complete information our shell improved. The ammunitions were when they could, eventually hurling more than 5,000 high explosive and gas shells into the woods and clearing the heights.

Fighting on to those treacherous woods, subject to flanking fire and in constant danger of being cut back, the marines continued to advance, regardless of fatigue and losses, until they held another quarter of a mile of the woods and the advance was halted. The new position was consolidated with the help of the engineers and food and ammunition were sent in. Lizzie (the Ford car) did heroic work on that day. A few light guns were got in to Sibley.

## American's Forge Ahead.

As a result of the fighting of June 7 along the line the Americans advanced their position over a six mile front.

On the 8th and 9th Sibley's men continued to rush those machine gun nests and to make further progress in the wood. It seemed as if nothing could stop them until they had reached the main body of the Germans. Meanwhile, Berry, who had been wounded, was relieved. Lieut.-Col. Wise, in command of his battalion of the Fifth, went in to support Sibley.

Our casualties were terrible; I will not attempt to give the figures. Our men were engaged in a sort of flanking that means heavy losses with the best of luck, but that did not check them. Their comrades fell, but they pressed on, and behind them they left dead Hunns piled three deep about those captured nests.

To the men in the woods, fighting most of the time, watching sleep when they could, the succession of night and day was hardly noticeable and there were few who could have told how long they had been fighting. Thus wrote Private George Budde of the Fifth to his parents:

I was always glad when the various positions held in the woods had a few holes strewn around into which we could crawl when necessary, but there were days in the first woods we went to especially when M. and myself, he being of the same size as I, under the stars with nothing but a blanket, while the others had gone from four to six feet under ground, which was not as foolish as it sounds, as the shells were really going over us, and besides there was a perfectly splendid place along the side of the road. I really did start to dig, but it just naturally tired me all to little bits and I quit with nothing to show for it but some elegant blisters. It seems really unbelievable, but there were hours at a time at that place, and others when we would lie perdu while a steady stream of missiles would be going sweetly over our heads, just a continuous humming whirr-r-r that can't be described. Most of the big ones do give notice



VETERANS OF BELLEAU WOOD UPON THEIR RETURN HOME.

of their approach most politely, and one generally has time to duck or take cover.

## Hurry Call for Chaplains.

On June 8 Major Evans jotted down a laconic memorandum to the effect that Holcomb had asked for both chaplains. That meant the hurried burial of our dead.

And right here let me put in a good word for those chaplains. Theirs is no easy berth, and they do not always receive the honor that is their due. The marine chaplains, like the members of the Medical Corps, are furnished by the navy. They are busy men. Besides holding services at the camps and in the various villages where the marines are billeted, and acting in a general way as the big brothers of the men, they have to censor all mail and serve as the statistical officers of the regiment. At the front they have charge of all burials, collect the bodies and attend to the matters of record and identification. And more often than not they volunteer to assist the surgeons.

In each of our two regiments there were two chaplains, a Protestant and a Catholic. After the battle was over all four of them were cited and decorated for heroic action in collecting and burying the dead and assisting the surgeons under fire.

Gradually terror and the realization of defeat began to creep into the hearts of the Boches. Wrote one of the boys:

Not once in the days of fighting that followed did a German stand up when the Americans got close to him. We've got their number and they know it. I wish I could get over and tell you all about it. I'm so full of stuff I simply can't write the things in a straightaway way.

You know how I did worry about a pistol and field glasses. Well, it wasn't necessary. I now have the latter, and the former I have had from the German Government could purchase for me, and the splendid new Laugue pistol that I swing at my belt is certainly the finest the Hohenzollern could provide for an American Army officer.

In many places they left so fast that clothing, boots, rifles, machine guns and all sorts of booty taken from French towns was left. Every soldier had at least two Boche overcoats for a mattress.

In one officer's overcoat Lieut. Blaisdell found a cat of nine tails, ample evidence of the statement of many prisoners that they were driven time and again to fight.

## German Treachery Everywhere.

There were evidences everywhere during this fighting of German treachery. Those Prussians were nasty fighters. The following is quoted from the lips of three men, one an officer, would be ample. During the progress of a hot engagement a number of Germans, hands aloft and crying "Kamerad!" approached a platoon of marines, who, justifiably assuming it meant surrender, waited for the Germans to come into their lines as prisoners. When about 300 yards distant the first line of Germans suddenly fell flat upon their faces, disclosing that they had been dragging machine guns by means of ropes attached to their belts.

Within three minutes the rear line immediately opened fire, and nearly thirty marines went down before, with a yell of rage, their comrades swept forward bent upon revenge. I am happy to state that not a German survived, for those who would have really surrendered when they were dastardly ruse failed were bayoneted without mercy.

As stated, I talked separately with three different marines at different times, and have no doubt of the truth of the story. When it spreads through the corps it will be safe to predict that the marines will never take a prisoner.

Can they be blamed? As one man remarked, "A good German is a dead German." Another said, "They are like wolves, and can only hunt in packs. Get one alone and he is easy meat."

## Kill or Be Killed.

Little of this sounds uplifting, and it smacks of callous sensibilities.

But the business that brought these men to France is not a refined one. It is kill or be killed, perhaps both, and the duty of each man in the American army is to kill as many of the enemy as may be, before he, in turn, is killed. Likewise it is his duty to study and understand the psychology of the German, and to view it in his crude way, although he might not understand such mental processes by the term psychology.

An occupation lacking refinement creates unrefined descriptive terms, and the man whose temporary trade is war chooses his own phrases and originates new definitions.

I will not deny that my nerves are tense with horror at what I have seen, and with pride at what our boys have done, even while my soul is sickened with this closer view of the cruel war. In the spirit of the men seen to-day, I am moved to greater admiration for their qualities and an abiding faith in our ability to finish as we have begun. Youth of the American army, flower of our young manhood, my blood is off to you! May victory perch upon your banners, and God give you the reward you deserve here and hereafter.

## In Hands of Enemy.

And here is further evidence of German gentleness from the pen of Private James Donohue, a Buffalo boy, who was captured by the enemy and was, I am told, the first American prisoner to escape and make his way back to our lines:

I attacked with our boys, and ran into a lot of Prizies. One of them hit me on the head with the butt of his rifle, and when I woke up I was inside the German lines being dragged before an officer at German headquarters. Every one I passed along the road kicked, jeered and spit at me.

When I landed in headquarters a pompous German officer asked me how many divisions we had in France. I said "thirty," but he didn't believe me. A guard was then placed over me, who watched me all night. Just as day was breaking I was roughly awakened and given an axe and without breakfast I had to cut a lot of brush that was to serve as camouflage for machine guns.

I was working close to the front lines and American machine gun bullets whistled past me for fair. I had to work all that night. When I tried to snatch even a few minutes of sleep a husky guard would give me an awful kick with a big hobnailed boot and I would grab the axe and go to chopping again. I saw three Germans disguised in American uniforms. I was getting so weak from hunger and loss of sleep that I thought I would go under any minute. Finally the guard gave me some bread, butter and thin, watery soup. I could not get any coffee.

## Plenty Germans to Bury.

Afterward they put me to digging trenches to bury dead Germans in. Along with other prisoners we dug long rows, two and three deep, into which were thrown the bodies of the whole German army.

Finally, one night I found my guard asleep. I walked him over the head with my pickaxe. He never moved. I ran away through the woods in front and there I chanced across some German Red Cross dogs. I found some canteens of water and hunks of bread tied on their backs, which I took.

All of a sudden I got where shells were bursting everywhere. I had run into a barrage and thought it was all up with me. But I ducked along and suddenly a sentry challenged me. I recognized him as an American and shouted at the top of my voice, "I am an American; don't shoot!"

So he passed me through the lines and that night I slept in the wood inside the lines and reported the next morning.

And so the battle continued, with our boys edging their way slowly ahead in the forest, the ghastly dead lying all about them. Companies that had entered the battle 250 strong dwindled to fifty or sixty with a sergeant or only a corporal in command.

## EVERY MAN WAS WOUNDED AND MANY OF THEM DECORATED.

losses. Then our artillery laid down a thick barrage behind their advanced line, preventing the bringing up of reinforcements. They could neither advance nor retreat; they were caught between two destructive fires. Gradually the barrage was lowered upon their advance line and their position became a slaughter pen. Those who got into town never got out again and the rest were driven back to their lines. The well organized attack was simply crumpled up and wiped out. We had very few casualties and took fifty men captive and one officer.

## Advance Slow, but Steady.

In Belleau Wood the advance after the 10th was slow but continuous behind an effective barrage. Almost imperceptibly our line was pushed forward among the trees, like water eating its way into a snow bank. As fast as they advanced the Marines dug in and stuck, though constantly shelled and gassed. There was less hand to hand fighting now, but casualties on both sides were numerous and the Marines continued to capture prisoners and machine guns.

Between June 10 and 15 the main attacks were made against the woods and nine counter-attacks were repulsed. The Germans tried to filter in from the left, but were beaten off. Boursches was subjected to an aerial bombardment, but the Marines stuck there too. What they have they hold. Private F. E. Steek of Camden, N. J., remembers this period rather vividly. For it was then he was wounded.

Steek's company did not take part in the attack on Belleau Wood until June 11, but they were not all idle while in reserve. He and two sergeants succeeded in sneaking out at night and bringing back wounded Marines they found in that area. Private Steek doesn't know whether his officers learned of these nightly "desertions." The trio succeeded, however, in rescuing many companions in this manner. Steek writes:

We came across a German officer seated comfortably with his knees crossed. Before him was spread a little fold table on which was cake, jam, cookies and a fine array of food. A knife and fork was in either hand.

Beside the officer was seated a large, bulky sergeant who had been kneeling. The damned needles were still between his fingers. Both their heads had been blown off by a large shell.

**Hot Fighting July 11.**  
We went into hot fighting on June 11, 2 P. M. A few hours before I had been on a detail that was bringing up hot coffee from the rear.

Hand grenades were distributed and then Capt. L. W. Williams lined us up in combat formation. Soon we were going single file through the woods and charging across the open area to where the Germans were secluded in their holes.

My duties were to lead a Charley or French automatic rifle. You could run about nine steps and then another clip would have to be inserted. Bullets silt my canteen, hit my scabbard and two or three went through my trousers without touching me. We had advanced in triangle formation about half a mile. I was in the front end of the "V" when three machine bullets got me. One went into my neck, another in my left shoulder and the third in my arm.

I tried to keep on in assisting the operation of the automatic rifle, but the blood came up in my throat. I forced my way back and hid in a shell hole in the woods until a little Marine found me. This fellow dragged me 500 yards on his shoulder and a first aid dugout. There a shelter-half was used as a stretcher and I was taken back to a dressing station.

Private John C. Geiger's company was also one of those that were held in reserve during the first few days of the fighting, but when they got their chance they went to it as though no Germans to kill. It was the attack of June 10 which they took a leading part in, and at last they found themselves entering the blood soaked wood.

**Impossible to Hold Them Back.**  
They surged forward in a two wave formation at five pace intervals, but

they were an impatient bunch and the waves did not last long in the wood. It was impossible to hold the second wave back, and the attacking force soon became one line of fierce fighting men, shooting, bayoneting and hurling grenades wherever the Boches dared show themselves. Geiger said:

Our men were yelling as if they were in a football game. You heard just one cry from the Germans; that was "Kamerad." We crossed an open space of nearly a mile when we discovered that we had hit the Germans' second line trench. Still we kept going. Of the twenty-five who were with me only four remained.

Suddenly we spotted a machine gun. Without a thought the four of us started to charge it. Two of the men were killed immediately. I was shot in the right leg. The last man escaped. He told other Marines of the machine gun, and in a few minutes a second and bigger advance was made. They surrounded the gun and the crew wanted to surrender. But there's not much use taking as prisoners men who fire at you until they see they are overpowered. I don't remember any prisoners walking back from that crowd.

**Falls in Line of Fire.**  
I lay wounded for nearly an hour. For a while I hardly dared to breathe. I was right in line with the machine gun's fire.

The bullets sped past my ears so closely that I couldn't hear them whizz or buzz. There was nothing but a loud "crackety-crack-crack" as they went by. It was just like having your head near the muzzle of the gun.

Soon the camouflage, consisting of high weeds around me, was shot away. Fortunately the machine gun tried for another target about the open area behind me and he was making a last stand at the northern end of the wood. So far so good, but our progress was now a mere crawl against concentrated resistance, and the fight was not over by any means. The enemy was still supported by the snipers of the forest and our men were under constant fire.

Then the Germans, realizing the seriousness of the situation, resolved to make one last desperate effort to regain what they had lost. Reserves were brought up, including an entirely fresh division, and their forces were strongly concentrated along the whole Belleau Wood front. On June 13 they attacked with stubborn fury. Their orders were to retake Belleau Wood and Boursches at all costs, and God knows they tried. But that depleted line of marines, backed now by artillery, still held fast. Held? Nay, worn down and decimated as they were by nearly two weeks of bitter fighting, they counter attacked, and for four days by day, they pressed the Prussians back.

**Torcy Taken With a Rush.**  
For days the marines kept up that steady, unrelenting grind, that constant battering at the German gates. They seemed not to know when they were overwhelmed and beaten. Then on June 18, their fury flamed out again. There was a scolding artillery shower from the American guns by way of preface, a quick drive across the open behind a barrage, and then the marines fell tooth and nail upon the town of Torcy. It was a short and merry battle. The crossroads below Torcy were taken at a rush and the troublesome German batteries behind the town were silenced.

On the 19th a heavy barrage tore up the woods and machine rifle and bayonet proceeded to complete the job. By the 24th the last German was cleared out of the main part of Belleau Wood—or was killed—but it was not until the 26th that the battle was over. On that day Major Shermer of the Sixth was transferred to the command of a battalion of the Fifth and attacked the last bit of woods held by the enemy, which lay like a small green island to the north of Belleau Wood proper. He took 200 prisoners, besides machine guns and other booty, and the last of that formerly victorious German army, smitten hip and thigh, was driven from cover and forced to fall back to a new line.

Before leaving the dead waste that was once Belleau Wood, now haunted by the memories of brave and fallen comrades, I have one more story to tell. It is another dog story, and it

was told by one of those cheerful ruffians who have been getting their broken bodies mended at the Brooklyn Naval Hospital. This fellow has had a close shave, but American surgical skill has pulled him through.

He took part in some of the hottest fighting in Belleau Wood and it took more than one piece of German metal to make him quit. The first wound didn't bother him much—"Just a scratch in the leg, and besides we needed every man and in the excitement I didn't care." So he kept on going until a piece of shell shattered the bone in his right leg below the knee. That stopped him. He did try to crawl, but weak from loss of blood and pain he finally gave it up, waiting for some one to find him and carry him in. The "scratch" had been a shell wound where a big chunk of flesh had been torn from the muscular tissue of his left leg, but in the excitement he hadn't known.

**What the Dog Did.**  
He lay for many hours—a whole day and night they told him later at the hospital—when he felt something pushing against his shoulder. He shut his eyes tight because he thought it might be a Heine. Then something warm and moist licked his cheek and travelled down toward his lacerated leg, and he looked. His own particular buddy wouldn't have been a more welcome sight than that Red Cross dog.

The dog was a big one and a mongrel, "They don't use any particular breed so far as I could notice," explained the Marine. "He was just a dog, but he sure had learned his tricks."

He placed himself in such position that the wounded man could see the canteen on his back. The Marine, parched and burning, needed no second invitation to take a long drink, as well as a new supply of water as long as he was able with fever and the water was wonderful, so wonderful that he just dropped back satisfied; but the Red Cross dog wasn't satisfied. He had come to do a certain thing and he knew his duty as well as any dog could. He kept pushing against the wounded man's shoulder until he just had to listen. The Marine said "listen" because it seemed almost as if the dog talked to him and said "Come on, buck up, you've got to get out of this."

And the Marine did. This dog, he grabbed the dog's tail with one hand and with the other and his useful knee he crawled forward at the dog's leading. But it was slow going and finally he had to give up in despair. The pain was too much, and he had to quit. But the dog didn't quit. He waited at a trot and after a while returned with two Red Cross stretcher men, who carried the Marine to the dressing station.

When the Marine was made comfortable his first thought was very natural. "If I could have food that was very good when he found that the dog would pay no attention to him. "That's the way they're trained," it was explained to him. "They pay no attention to any man unless he is wounded and then only to bring him into safety. They go out there in the woods under shell fire and in the wounded or leading the stretcher men to them, but when they have done that they aren't interested in the wounded any more."

"Another thing they have learned is never to eat anything except food that is given to them by their masters in the dressing station. They are taught to be suspicious of food, for earlier in the war some Red Cross dogs were poisoned."

"They sure are wonderful," the Marine says. "I remember I could have brought that dog home with me, but of course he's enlisted for the term of the war and had to stay in France."

**Capture of Vaux.**  
The action which centered about Belleau Wood and Boursches, and which had for its object the relieving of the menacing German pressure northward of Chateau Thierry, may be said to have been brought to a close on July 31, when most of the Sixth and Twenty-third Infantry of our division took the town of Vaux behind a barrage of American artillery fire.

Vaux lies on the Metz to Paris road about two miles east of Triangles Farm and half way to Chateau Thierry. (See diagram 2.) Its capture was necessary to straighten the line and to free the Metz to Paris road of the danger of a German attack. The American lines were rather too far advanced on the left to make the position secure, and what was needed was a strong salient to be wiped out. With this removed, Chateau Thierry, the Bois de Belleau and the road to Paris were relatively safe.

The task was given to the two regiments of infantry which had hitherto been in the line, and they had been merely holding their position of the line and setting as a barrier across the threatened road. The capture of Vaux was not spectacular, but was a clearly defined job from a military point of view, for the capture of the town in fact, and there was perfect artillery preparation, such as had not been possible in the earlier fighting. Following a thoroughly effective barrage, the infantry took their objectives almost without loss, and the work for which our division had been thrown in was completed.

The Marine Brigade was soon withdrawn to a quiet place for a period of hard earned rest, to mend battered heads and limbs, to fill the gaps in the ranks with replacements, and to prepare for the next job. In about two weeks it was "Marines to the front!" again.

(Copyright, 1919, McClure Newspaper Syndicate.)

Gen. Catlin Tells How His Men Piled Up Enemy Dead Until Last Spark of Foes' Fighting Spirit Flickered Out

was told by one of those cheerful ruffians who have been getting their broken bodies mended at the Brooklyn Naval Hospital. This fellow has had a close shave, but American surgical skill has pulled him through.

He took part in some of the hottest fighting in Belleau Wood and it took more than one piece of German metal to make him quit. The first wound didn't bother him much—"Just a scratch in the leg, and besides we needed every man and in the excitement I didn't care." So he kept on going until a piece of shell shattered the bone in his right leg below the knee. That stopped him. He did try to crawl, but weak from loss of blood and pain he finally gave it up, waiting for some one to find him and carry him in. The "scratch" had been a shell wound where a big chunk of flesh had been torn from the muscular tissue of his left leg, but in the excitement he hadn't known.

## What the Dog Did.

He lay for many hours—a whole day and night they told him later at the hospital—when he felt something pushing against his shoulder. He shut his eyes tight because he thought it might be a Heine. Then something warm and moist licked his cheek and travelled down toward his lacerated leg, and he looked. His own particular buddy wouldn't have been a more welcome sight than that Red Cross dog.

The dog was a big one and a mongrel, "They don't use any particular breed so far as I could notice," explained the Marine. "He was just a dog, but he sure had learned his tricks."

He placed himself in such position that the wounded man could see the canteen on his back. The Marine, parched and burning, needed no second invitation to take a long drink, as well as a new supply of water as long as he was able with fever and the water was wonderful, so wonderful that he just dropped back satisfied; but the Red Cross dog wasn't satisfied. He had come to do a certain thing and he knew his duty as well as any dog could. He kept pushing against the wounded man's shoulder until he just had to listen. The Marine said "listen" because it seemed almost as if the dog talked to him and said "Come on, buck up, you've got to get out of this."

And the Marine did. This dog, he grabbed the dog's tail with one hand and with the other and his useful knee he crawled forward at the dog's leading. But it was slow going and finally he had to give up in despair. The pain was too much, and he had to quit. But the dog didn't quit. He waited at a trot and after a while returned with two Red Cross stretcher men, who carried the Marine to the dressing station.

When the Marine was made comfortable his first thought was very natural. "If I could have food that was very good when he found that the dog would pay no attention to him. "That's the way they're trained," it was explained to him. "They pay no attention to any man unless he is wounded and then only to bring him into safety. They go out there in the woods under shell fire and in the wounded or leading the stretcher men to them, but when they have done that they aren't interested in the wounded any more."

"Another thing they have learned is never to eat anything except food that is given to them by their masters in the dressing station. They are taught to be suspicious of food, for earlier in the war some Red Cross dogs were poisoned."

"They sure are wonderful," the Marine says. "I remember I could have brought that dog home with me, but of course he's enlisted for the term of the war and had to stay in France."

**Capture of Vaux.**  
The action which centered about Belleau Wood and Boursches, and which had for its object the relieving of the menacing German pressure northward of Chateau Thierry, may be said to have been brought to a close on July 31, when most of the Sixth and Twenty-third Infantry of our division took the town of Vaux behind a barrage of American artillery fire.

Vaux lies on the Metz to Paris road about two miles east of Triangles Farm and half way to Chateau Thierry. (See diagram 2.) Its capture was necessary to straighten the line and to free the Metz to Paris road of the danger of a German attack. The American lines were rather too far advanced on the left to make the position secure, and what was needed was a strong salient to be wiped out. With this removed, Chateau Thierry, the Bois de Belleau and the road to Paris were relatively safe.

The task was given to the two regiments of infantry which had hitherto been in the line, and they had been merely holding their position of the line and setting as a barrier across the threatened road. The capture of Vaux was not spectacular, but was a clearly defined job from a military point of view, for the capture of the town in fact, and there was perfect artillery preparation, such as had not been possible in the earlier fighting. Following a thoroughly effective barrage, the infantry took their objectives almost without loss, and the work for which our division had been thrown in was completed.

The Marine Brigade was soon withdrawn to a quiet place for a period of hard earned rest, to mend battered heads and limbs, to fill the gaps in the ranks with replacements, and to prepare for the next job. In about two weeks it was "Marines to the front!" again.

(Copyright, 1919, McClure Newspaper Syndicate.)